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Choral Music and Multiculturalism:
Authenticity, Performance Practice, and Current Trends

by

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Abstract

The increasingly multicultural face of North American schools has prompted greater interest in creating authentic performances of ethnic choral music. Authenticity in the performance of multicultural choral music is a matter of compromise, since true authenticity as defined by ethnomusicological practice is impossible in most choral performance contexts. Ethnic choral music can be either directly taken from a cultural tradition or derived from original ethnic source material. Challenges in the performance of non-Western choral music include departures from *bel canto* practices as well as non-Western treatment of musical elements such as pitch and tempo. Other aspects of performance practices which warrant consideration are extra-musical factors such as the original performance venue for the source music and the indigenous function of a given source music. Trends in multicultural choral music are examined, including rehearsal practices, performing groups, and composers' treatment of ethnic source material.

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The advent of ethnomusicology as an academic field has made a great impact in the study of music in the Western world. Musicians are no longer considered by Western culture to be legitimate artists only if they are trained in and exclusively perform art music in the traditional European sense of the term. Most introductory music history courses have grown to include a broader and more global sense of the growth and study of music. Even symphony orchestras, which are among the most traditional of performing groups, now often dedicate some part of each season to the performance of music influenced by cultural traditions other than that of Western European art music, or welcome guest ethnic instrumental ensembles or singers to contribute their sounds to an orchestral program. The major limitations to further expansion of this kind of multi-ethnic programming are two-fold: first, not all ethnic musics are equally transferable to an orchestral medium, and second, there is a dearth of professional musicians who are trained in both Western classical traditions and other world musics.

The first of these obstacles is unsurpassable, for no amount of education or study will make a symphony orchestra (or any other Western instrumental ensemble) sound like a true Gamelan or an African drumming circle. Instruments are integral aspects of a musical culture, and to substitute a Western equivalent is to sacrifice some part of the music's essence and its individuality.

If instruments are the unique fingerprints for any culture's music, the human voice is blessed with the opposite attribute. Though vocal aesthetics and techniques vary wildly from culture to culture, the instrument remains essentially identical in structure and function. Every culture sings, and nearly every culture

participates in some form of group singing as well. The vocal counterpart of the orchestra, the choir, is therefore freed of some of the restrictions that bind instrumental ensembles, and Western choral music has expanded accordingly. The standard range of choral repertoire now includes many kinds of world musics, from African American spirituals, to vocal realizations of Latin American styles, to traditional Jewish music, to, most pervasively, an extensive range of folk tunes from all over the world, transposed into a choral medium. Dan Graves studies this shift in the choral canon and, by analysing several indicators of multicultural elements in choral programming (most significantly, music performed at national and regional ACDA conventions), he shows that in the last twenty-five years of the twentieth century, there has been a significant rise in the performance of and interest in multicultural choral music.¹

Along with this expansion of the choral landscape, however, several issues surround the performance and programming of such repertoire. From an ethnomusicological perspective, the simple removal of a music from its indigenous site of creation and its appropriation by another culture (let alone another type of musical ensemble) is an act which violates the basic nature of the original music. If choral conductors are to strive for a broader perspective and cultural scope in performance and pedagogy, ethnic musics must be modified.

If the original music is arranged in any way, sung in a different language, or with different accompaniment, or even for a different purpose (i.e., a concert environment for a work song), the alterations are even more significant and the

¹ Dan Graves, "Multiculturalism and the Choral Canon 1975-2000," *Choral Journal* 41 (September 2000): 39.

music becomes increasingly removed from its original state. Anthony J. Palmer refers to this issue as a continuum, which he calls the ‘authenticity-compromise’ spectrum² (see Figure 1). On one end of the spectrum is the music in a state of absolute authenticity (essentially, the music performed by indigenous performers in an indigenous environment). As variations are introduced, the music moves further away from the unattainable point of absolute authenticity.



Figure 1: Authenticity Continuum (Adapted from Palmer (1992), fig. 1.)

How far along the spectrum can ethnic music travel, and still be considered truly representative of its source culture? As applied to choral music, this question is a multi-faceted one. This essay explores the question of *authenticity* within a choral context. Authenticity is of particular concern in Canadian choral music as our country places especial emphasis on multiculturalism and on the important sub-issue of cultural sensitivity.

Music Education as a Guiding Force

Even though the impetus for further study of ethnic musics is derived from ethnomusicology, music education and school music in particular have been the primary force behind the growth of multicultural choral music. As classrooms become increasingly culturally diverse, music educators seek to address a broader

² Anthony J. Palmer, “World Musics in Music Education: The Matter of Authenticity,” *International Journal of Music Education* 19 (1992): 32.

perspective of music than that offered by traditional Eurocentric curricula.³ Where once it might have been culturally appropriate to educate a largely Caucasian and Christian elementary music class only in the Western classical music tradition, it is now considered inappropriate to exclude other traditions.

Some critics fear that the Western tradition of art music is neglected in North American schools with the inclusion of other musical traditions. Estelle Jorgensen goes so far as to say that little of value is being taught in contemporary music classrooms, comparing the marginalization of Western classical music to the former marginalization of other world musics. She suggests that music educators ought not to view the classical tradition as antiquated, but as an ancient link to other world cultures.⁴

This largely Eurocentric opinion is out of place in contemporary North American society. Government approved curricula place an emphasis on cross-cultural cooperation and mutual understanding, and interdisciplinary education requires that these goals be carried into the arena of fine arts education as well. It is no longer a question of whether multicultural music should be sung in the classroom, but a question of how this music should be taught. In response to rising demands for world music content in schools, music educators initially turned to a variety of questionable sources to meet their requirements. As Palmer describes:

Usually, songs taken from around the world were placed in textbooks with piano accompaniments added, with texts translated

³ Sharon Gratto, Janis McCauley, and Robert Nater, "Global Voices in Song: A College-Public School Partnership," *Choral Journal* 41 (March 2001): 24.

⁴ Estelle Jorgensen, "Western Classical Music and General Education," *Philosophy of Music Education Review* 11 (Fall 2003): 130–140.

and sometimes altered to fit American conceptions, and generally ‘cleansed’ of their rhythmic and tonal ‘irregularities’.⁵

As educators became more and more aware of the work of ethnomusicologists, it became apparent that it was no longer acceptable nor appropriate to refer to these songs as authentic reproductions of world music. Discussions of authenticity as applied to a music classroom are becoming more frequent and ethnomusicology plays an important role in what should or should not be taught when it comes to multicultural music.

A New Continuum for Ethnic Choral Music

Multicultural music has been present within a choral context in many forms for decades. The most pervasive and widely programmed multicultural representative is the African American spiritual, which is almost always performed as a written choral arrangement of a folk melody. Though not always considered to be ‘world music’ per se, there are also hundreds of other types of folk song arrangements, from Alice Parker and Robert Shaw’s treatment of American and English melodies, to more contemporary arrangements of Chinese songs, African songs, and – particularly in Canada – music which is derived from the musical traditions of the First Nations.

According to Palmer’s authenticity-compromise construct, these arrangements are far removed from true authenticity. So, too, are the myriad choral works which claim no direct folk source for a theme, but which utilize one or more elements of a culture’s music, such as R. Murray Schafer’s *Gamelan*. These

⁵ Palmer, “World Musics”, 32.

works, and others like them, have been and continue to be composed and performed as a matter of course. Yet if choral conductors are to honour the importance of a music's authenticity, should such arrangements and culturally-influenced works still exist in the choral canon?

The simple answer is 'yes'. Excluding the most sanitized and un-ethnic of choral arrangements, such compositions are viewed as valuable and valid music, and must be considered to exist in a separate category of multicultural choral music. Many arrangements of styles of folk music are not intended as strict reproductions of a style. For example, many choral arrangements of traditional African American spirituals exist in the standard repertoire, but most could not be considered authentic reproductions of the genre. Indeed many are intended as artistic reinterpretations of pre-existing source music. Therefore, in performing and writing choral music, we must reconsider our authenticity-compromise construct to account for the creation of new art drawn from pre-existing melodic and textural materials, or from a given vocal aesthetic. To demonstrate, a second continuum could be constructed (see Figure 2):

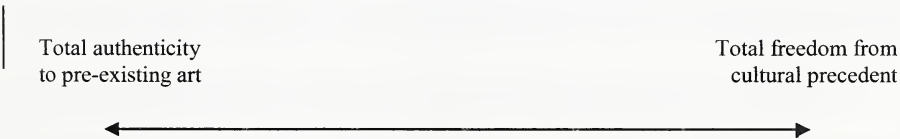


Figure 2: Cultural Precedence Continuum

It is evident that both extremes of this continuum are completely theoretical in nature when discussing multicultural choral music. On the left side, absolute authenticity is not possible in all choral concert situations, as absolute authenticity

precludes removal from the culture of the music (including the normal setting of performance) and requires that indigenous musicians be the only authentic performers⁶.

At the opposite end of the spectrum, the most experimental and avant-garde of compositions must exist within some pre-determined artistic confines, even if their primary purpose is to defy these confines. Every great choral masterwork in the European tradition exists somewhere in the middle of this spectrum, remaining neither completely true to its original intended performance, nor, by its nature as a work of art in a cultural tradition, completely original and free from cultural influence.

Multicultural choral music, however, may be spread more diffusely across the spectrum, creating two main groupings:⁷

1) Authentic Ethnic Choral Music

Of the two types of multicultural choral music, the authentic ethnic genre is rare in Western performance but does exist, nonetheless. This category does not imply absolute authenticity but implies the intent, on the part of the composer (if any) and/or the performers, to approximate authenticity with as little compromise as is practicable. This category is rich in pedagogical possibility as the goal of authenticity may include discussions of a song's history, its social context, its instrumentation, or the musical theory (i.e. scale constructions, pitch inflections) upon which it is built. For example, much of the African choral music discussed later in this paper can be performed with a high degree of authenticity by a

⁶ Palmer, "World Musics", 32–33.

⁷ Anthony J. Palmer, "Ethnic Musics in Choral Performance: A Perspective on Problems," *Choral Journal* 40 (December 1999): 10.

Western choir, incorporating traditional elements of movement, vocal aesthetic, and improvisatory rhythmic calls.

2) Ethnic-Influenced Choral Music

This music is more common and, by definition, less sensitive to issues of authenticity. This is the grouping which includes Schafer's *Gamelan*, as well as many other more broadly-influenced choral works. Choral arrangements of folk songs (particularly those which are monophonic or heterophonic in their indigenous form) also fall into this category. Though works in this grouping are not as concerned with authenticity to the original source, they still often require certain aspects of authenticity. For example, the text of a folk song arrangement may include the original language or an arrangement of a spiritual may be performed with authentic vocal techniques, quality and style.

Not all ethnic choral works clearly fall in one category or the other, of course. Music which is the result of two or more cultures coming together, such as the multi-source music of Cuba, is both authentic and ethnically-influenced. However, for the purposes of this discussion, the application of these two, broad categories clearly untangles the issues of authenticity within the realm of multicultural choral music.

World Music in the Choral World – Performance Practice

There are many challenges facing a Western choir that elects to sing multicultural choral works. Most choral singers are amateurs, but even amateur singers with considerable choral experience have been exposed to Western music

and conductors trained in the Western classical tradition. This tradition carries the weight of centuries of accumulated performance practice, and in order to approach many types of multicultural music, even the most basic of Western classical tenets must be questioned. Table 1 provides a brief survey of some of the fundamental aspects of choral performance practice as applied to the two categories of multicultural choral music previously delineated.

Issue	Western Classical Tradition	Ethnic-Influenced Music	Authentic Ethnic Music
Who performs the music?	Music is almost always specifically composed for and sung by a choral ensemble, often with mixed voices.	This music is usually intended for performance by a non-indigenous choir, and therefore the cultural identity of the group performing is not a concern.	Not all ethnic vocal music is performed by a chorus, and even when it is, the Western conception of a chorus – with mixed voices, in harmony – may not fit the cultural tradition of the ethnic music. ⁸
What is the function of the music?	Concert performance or worship.	Concert performance or worship, as with Western classical music. However, it can be beneficial to consider the original function of the source music (i.e. a folk song that is traditionally sung at dances) in order to better communicate the mood of the music.	Various. Very often, ethnic music is not intended for a concert performance, but for use in worship, work, or other aspects of everyday life. Some cultures believe music has healing properties. ⁹
How is the music composed or constructed?	The majority of works are based on a tonal diatonic system, using forms and development techniques in the tradition.	This can vary with the source material and the degree to which the piece is influenced by it. Often, there is some mixture of tonal harmony and non-Western musical structures.	Various, depending on source culture. May employ different scales, rhythms, and forms.
How is the music performed by the artists?	Western choral music is mostly based on a <i>bel canto</i> vocal aesthetic, with emphasis placed on creating a good choral blend and balance. There are also highly-systematized (though	Some compromises can occur here between Western and non-Western traditions. Composers can draw upon non-Western vocal timbres, ornamentations, dynamics, and	The vocal timbre can vary wildly from Western ideals and may utilize vocal techniques outside the Western scope of singing. Ornamentation, dynamics, and

⁸ As Palmer states, “[A] significant part of the world’s music does not conform to the Western choral form and would have to be adapted in some way.” (from “Ethnic Musics,” 9.)

⁹ David P. McAllester, “North America / Native America,” in *Worlds of Music*, ed. Jeff Todd Titon, 4th ed., (Stamford: Schirmer, 2002), 46.

	often closely debated) traditions for ornamentation, dynamics, and articulation.	articulations.	articulation are unique to each non-Western musical tradition.
How is the music taught or transmitted?	Print music is read by all singers and the conductor guides the choir through the music, often with the aid of a rehearsal pianist.	Usually, this music is also printed, and singers will learn the music in traditional Western style as described.	In the majority of world musics, music is transmitted aurally, with no written component or formal rehearsal.

Table 1: *Performance Practice Issues in Multicultural Choral Music*

Table 1 identifies four areas of performance practice which must be considered for the performance of ethnic musics. As a piece of music moves closer to absolute authenticity, these issues become more important. This is especially true in the case of choral pieces which aim for ethnic authenticity, and there are many different approaches which take these points of performance practice into consideration. Some of these approaches will be discussed and analysed later in this paper.

Vocal Aesthetics and Vocal Abuse

Though the foregoing issues are important, the question of vocal performance practice is the most contentious for conductors of choral music. Many world musics demand a vocal timbre which diverges significantly from traditional Western ideals. Though aesthetic preferences vary from conductor to conductor, generally speaking, most choral directors seek a vocal style that is often termed *bel canto*.

The phrase, its history, and its current meaning, are problematic at best. *Grove Music Online* provides the following definition:

The phrase ‘bel canto’, along with a number of similar constructions . . . has been used without specific meaning and with widely varying subjective interpretations Generally understood, the term ‘bel canto’ refers to the Italian vocal style of the 18th and early 19th centuries, the qualities of which include perfect legato production throughout the range, the use of a light tone in the higher registers and agile and flexible delivery.¹⁰

As is noted in the text, *Management of the Voice and Its Disorders*, “within this tiny part of Western culture, there is enormous disagreement about the details of vocal production, and singing teachers have the reputation of being unable to agree with one another unless they belong to the same school of pedagogy.”¹¹ However, the text goes on to describe several general pedagogical principles common to the tradition. Emphasis is placed on a tension-free but erect posture, unobstructed breathing conducive to long phrases, a constant, low, and relaxed laryngeal position, and an even vibrato. Vocal tone should not be noticeably altered by register changes, valuing a legato singing style. Pitch is fixed and non-Western pitch inflections (i.e., warbles, ululations, or a change of pitch on the release of a tone) beyond a stylistic scoop into a note’s onset are discouraged. Vowels are based on the placement and purity of Italian vowels and should all be of equal vibrancy and resonant quality. When all these elements are combined through vocal training, an unamplified *bel canto* voice can be heard over instrumental accompaniment – in some cases, a full-blown Romantic orchestra – due to the resonance of a frequency called the ‘singer’s formant.’¹² This

¹⁰ Owen Jander and Ellen T. Harris, “Bel Canto,” *Grove Music Online* ed. L. Macy, <http://www.grovemusic.com>.

¹¹ Linda Rammage, Murray Morrison, Hamish Nichol, et al., *Management of the Voice and Its Disorders*, 2nd ed. (Vancouver: Singular, 2001), 231.

¹² Richard Miller, *The Structure of Singing: System and Art in Vocal Technique* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1996), 55.

frequency resonates at about 2800 Hz (well above the normal range of fundamental frequencies of sung pitches), and appears to be caused by constructive wave reflection along the vocal tract.¹³ The singer's formant is a defining characteristic of the classical Western vocal tone.

Most scholarly literature on vocal pedagogy is researched and prepared by Western singing teachers and pedagogues trained in the Western classical tradition. Speech pathologists and otolaryngologists, who provide another significant portion of the literature on vocal production, are advised by classically trained singing teachers. The third group of contributors, acoustical scientists who seek to uncover the physical properties of singing, are less biased, since the production of a Romantic operatic tone is as interesting a vocal phenomenon for analysis as the laryngeal machinations of a Tuvan throat singer. The fact remains that the body of research on vocal production in today's literature, is written primarily from a Western perspective. Even though vocal pedagogues may have heated debates about the finer details of vocal production, or even contend some of the afore-mentioned pedagogical aims and theories, the debate occurs within the *bel canto* Western European vocal aesthetic.

Arising from this Western prejudice is the notion that any mode of singing falling outside the studied modes of vocal production is 'bad' technique, or technique dangerous to the vocal mechanism.

Mary Goetze states:

Western vocal pedagogues generally believe that singing in any other way than a European style will threaten students' singing technique

¹³ Bruce Pullan, "Vocal Technique," (lecture, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, BC, September 26, 2002).

and vocal health. Despite the fact that singers within diverse cultures have enjoyed singing in these styles for centuries, we operate on the assumption that singing in any way other than our own must be unhealthy or impossible.¹⁴

While there is not much evidence in the literature on vocal pedagogy which specifically explores the safety and healthiness of non-Western vocal timbres, studies show that belt technique (employed by singers in the musical theatre, pop, and jazz genres among others) is not harmful to the voice when taught and used carefully. As with many aspects of vocal pedagogy, this is an area which is still hotly debated. Richard Miller condemns popular singing techniques as ultimately destructive to the voice: “The major concern of the voice teacher of the popular performer is no longer whether ‘the Broadway voice’ can be kept in healthy condition; it is how to avoid aphonic episodes with singers who ignore the canons of beauty, strength and health.”¹⁵ In the opposing camp, Robert Edwin uses *bel canto* terminology such as *chiaro-scuro* to describe good belt pedagogy and describes the laryngeal activity specific to the sound, claiming that belt technique need not be harmful to the voice.¹⁶ However, the debate over the healthiness of non-*bel canto* singing techniques persists.

As a case in point, an article published in *Choral Journal* describes a situation where a non-European vocal aesthetic – that of gospel singing – has resulted in a significant degree of vocal damage. Thomas Cleveland’s investigation of a seventy-voice gospel choir showed that, of sixty-four singers examined, forty

¹⁴ Mary Goetze, “Challenges of Performing Diverse Cultural Music,” *Music Educators Journal* 87 (July 2000): 24.

¹⁵ Richard Miller, *On the Art of Singing* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 119.

¹⁶ Robert Edwin, “Popular Song and Musical Theatre: ‘Belt Yourself,’” *Journal of Singing* 60 (January/February 2004): 286.

showed signs of vocal abuse “in the form of polyps/nodules on the vocal folds”¹⁷. While Cleveland seems as alarmed by these results as any North American singing teacher would be, he also notes, “most of the singers did not have a complaint regarding their voices, and, in fact, aside from occasional hoarseness or an incidental loss of voice by some of the members, those with polyps were amazed to discover they had an abnormal exam.”¹⁸ Despite clinical manifestations of vocal difficulties, the singers themselves were untroubled by their vocal problems. Cleveland provides two possible reasons for what appears to be a lack of awareness. First, he postulates that the gospel singers are mostly untrained amateurs who do not perceive their vocal difficulties as problems needing a solution. Second, based on Cleveland’s discussions within the community of gospel singers, there is a belief that “a measure of a successful performance is the degree of hoarseness during and after the performance.”¹⁹

This second proposed cause is far more interesting from a multicultural perspective, because it bears witness to the fact that not every musical culture values the same level of vocal function. Western singing culture is built around the cult of the opera singer, and, as Cleveland observes, “a highly trained singer who performs operatic roles may find that the least malfunction of the vocal folds causes great concern.”²⁰ Western culture tends to idolize the singer as a performer, and the performance must be as near to perfection and vocal sound ideal as possible. Within other cultures this is not the case. Vocal timbres other

¹⁷ Thomas Cleveland, “On the Voice: An Examination of Sixty-Four Voices of a Seventy-Voice Gospel Choir: Implications for Vocal Health,” *Choral Journal* 44 (April 2004): 45.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*

than that of *bel canto* may not always be conducive to perfect vocal health as is required by the rigours of Western classical music, but if the performer is not required to sing Rossini to a packed opera house, what is the real harm? The harm, from the perspective of a choral conductor choosing ethnic repertoire, is that the demands of one ethnic vocal timbre may cause his or her singers to suffer when singing Western classical literature in another part of the program. Should Western conductors then disregard the need for authenticity when considering matters of vocal timbre? If multicultural music is to be sung respectfully, this is an important issue. Miller admits, “With the burgeoning Western world interest in non-Western cultures comes the question of how ethnomusical vocal sounds are produced, and whether the Western ideal of skilled vocalism has not been too narrow with regard to matters of function.”²¹ Determining what causes vocal damage is the first step in deciding whether or not an ethnic vocal timbre is ultimately vocally damaging.

While the lack of literature in this area persists, we may glean some understanding of the problem from the debate over popular singing techniques. Robert Edwin describes a student experiencing vocal problems while rehearsing a strenuous role for a musical, but he doesn’t blame the change in vocal aesthetics for the sudden vocal difficulties. Rather, he recommends “better strategies for coping with the vocal demands of [the] character [role].”²² He goes on to list other forms of vocal abuse, which include over-rehearsing and shouting. These are both forms of what speech pathologists term vocal hyperfunction.

²¹ Miller, *On the Art of Singing*, 119.

²² Robert Edwin, “Voice, How Do We Abuse Thee? Let Us Count the Ways,” *Journal of Singing* 52 (September/October 1995): 65.

Apart from vocal problems caused by clinical or medical considerations, Richard Miller describes vocal hyperfunction as a frequent source of vocal difficulty, especially in regard to onsets (vocal attack) and vibrato, which are both common areas of variance in other vocal timbres.²³ Hyperfunction is a clinical term used to describe any kind of overexertion, not only of the vocal apparatus, but of any muscles. In regard to singing, hyperfunction is used to refer to the overexertion of the muscles used in vocal production, commonly referred to as ‘oversinging’²⁴. However, the problems caused by oversinging or hyperfunction are linked to the amount of singing a performer is doing. Robert Sataloff states:

As with running, swimming, or any other athletic activity that depends upon sustained, coordinated muscle activity, singing requires conditioning to build up strength and endurance. Singers who are accustomed to singing for 1 or 2 hours a day stress their physical voice-producing mechanism severely when they suddenly begin rehearsing for 14 hours daily immediately prior to performance.²⁵

Sataloff refers to oversinging in preparation for performance in the Western classical style, but one could apply the same principles to performance using other vocal timbres. Amateur choral singers who are trained in the Western classical style often approach new non-Western timbres haphazardly, and enthusiasm for a new piece combined with incautious rehearsal can lead to vocal strain caused by oversinging in the new timbre. Inexperienced conductors and singers alike might assume that the balanced and precise approach of Western vocal pedagogy more than adequately prepares them for tackling a new vocal timbre, particularly if it

²³ Miller, 2–3, 191–192.

²⁴ Robert T. Sataloff, “Clinical Evaluation of the Professional Singer,” *Ear, Nose and Throat Journal* 66 (July 1987): 267.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, *Vocal Health and Pedagogy* (San Diego: Singular Publishing Group, 1998), 249.

seems to emphasize some aspect of *bel canto* pedagogy. For example, the bright or nasal timbre of some Asian vocal music might be described by a Western conductor as emphasizing the *chiaro* part of the voice. If we approach a new timbre as though it is not merely an extension of Western technique, but rather an entirely new function for the vocal mechanism, we would exert more caution. Muscles in the vocal mechanism are delicate and agile, but they are still muscles and with proper conditioning, they should grow as accustomed to a high laryngeal position, such as that used in many kinds of Aboriginal musics, as they are to a lower *bel canto* position. Therefore, warm-ups for rehearsals that incorporate ethnic music should not merely concentrate on developing a Western *bel canto* tone, but also prepare the singers for new and unfamiliar vocal timbres that are required by the new music. Sharon Mabry, discussing a similar process for approaching extended vocal techniques in contemporary vocal compositions, recommends that “[p]ieces may be selected that gradually strengthen the range, stamina, and flexibility of the voice without putting too many demands on its current abilities.”²⁶ In similar fashion, conductors should take care to build up the laryngeal flexibility as rehearsals progress, gradually increasing the vocal demands in the new timbres so as to allow the voice time to strengthen and adjust. In this way, ethnic timbres might more safely be approximated without danger of injuring a singer’s capacity to sing European repertoire. Goetze describes this approach from her own experiences: “I have found that with careful conditioning and sensitivity to vocal fatigue, the exploration of multiple vocal styles can be

²⁶ Sharon Mabry, *Exploring Twentieth-Century Vocal Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 12.

done without risk and may even contribute to vocal facility and endurance.”²⁷ Fred Onovwerosuoke is another supporter of this approach, stating, “Any choir can excel at any music, if they set their mind to it.”²⁸ He goes on to cite the example of a Swedish choir, the Joybells Gospel Choir, whose goal is to approximate a gospel vocal timbre as accurately as possible. Comparing the Joybells’ performance with that of an African American gospel choir, Onovwerosuoke states that it is difficult to distinguish between the two. He concludes, “The Joybells choir’s credible performance is a testament to the fact that any group can adopt, adapt to, and even master any new art form from a different culture.”²⁹

There is still a need for further research regarding the effects of non-Western vocal techniques on the vocal mechanism. The few studies that exist, such as Cleveland’s research into gospel singers, focus on untrained and unmonitored amateur singers, and they fail to satisfactorily account for the many singers who, as professional musicians in their culture, can perform for decades without manifesting any vocal problems. Conductors can be successful in having their choirs emulate vocal timbres other than *bel canto* if they exercise due caution in regard to vocal technique.

²⁷ Goetze, 25.

²⁸ Fred Onovwerosuoke, “Contemplating African Choral Music: Insights for Non-Indigenes and Foreign Conductors,” *Choral Journal* 42 (May 2002): 14.

²⁹ *Ibid*, 15.

Other Musical Considerations for Authentic Performances

While the problem of authentic vocal timbres is probably the most contentious issue for choral conductors wishing to program multicultural music, there are other points of musical practice that warrant a conductor's attention, since they may differ radically from accepted Western notions. Palmer lists several points of analysis in the musical structure and performance of multicultural works: pitch, time, and musical expression.³⁰

Pitch: Palmer discusses scalar structures, intonation, and 'the pitch envelope' (which encompasses "the approach, sustain, and release"³¹ of a note). "We [Western musicians] tend to have a pitch fetish and would never think of performing Mozart with any kind of a scooping effect."³² However, most other musical cultures are not so rigid with notions of pitch and intonation.

Time: Palmer emphasizes flexibility of tempi and different rhythmic or metrical structures.³³ If we examine these aspects of time through the lens of Western theory, we may apply Western labels – such as syncopation, rubato, and metric modulations – which are not actually descriptive of the processes as viewed by the musical culture.

Musical Expression: This area includes considerations such as the vocal timbre (discussed at length above), dynamics, and ornamentation.

The music of any non-Western culture can have a history of performance practice as diverse as Western traditions, so dictating a performance style for any

³⁰ "Ethnic Musics," 12–13.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *Ibid.*, 14.

³³ *Ibid.*, 13.

one kind of ethnic choral music is as difficult as codifying Western performance practice itself. For all of the above points, as with vocal timbres, Palmer, Page, and Goetze advise deferring to an expert – either an ethnomusicologist or an indigenous musician in the culture. Just as in Western music, the path to a truly authentic performance is not always clear, and interpretations of a correct performance style can be subjective. However, the more educated we are as performers with regards to any given music, Western or otherwise, the better able we are to make informed decisions with regards to intra-musical aspects of performance.

Extra-Musical Considerations

Many extra-musical performance practice considerations must be taken into account for a more authentic performance. For example, the function of a piece, the historical background of the music, the meaning of the texts, if any, the opinions of members of the indigenous culture towards the music or the text, and the indigenous environment in which the music might be performed, including the interactivity between audience and singers impact the mood and authenticity of the performance. These considerations, while important for both authentic ethnic and ethnic-influenced music, are of particular urgency when performing the former type of multicultural choral music, as it is the authentic ethnic music which requires closer attention to the cultural roots of a piece.

The function of a given kind of music is often reflected in the way it is performed. A work song may be performed in an imprecise manner because it is

meant to pass time and raise spirits, not to elevate a listener's soul. A ceremonial song may be sung by only a few sacred practitioners, or exclusively by men. As with all ethnic music in choral performance, some concessions must be made. Not all indigenous music settings are conducive to performance in a concert setting, and thus sacrifices in authenticity are necessary. However, this does not always exclude a conductor from giving consideration to the original function of a work and the setting in which it might be performed in its indigenous environment. Just because a requiem mass is performed in a concert hall instead of a church, the reverent and mournful atmosphere of the work should not be disregarded. The same ought to be true for ethnic music.

Music education places an emphasis on music students not only having the technical skills required to perform a piece, but a comprehension of the piece's background – its historical context, its precedents in the repertoire, the story of its text or of its composer. This, too, is an integral aspect of performing ethnic music. Time constraints in rehearsal and the conductor's own lack of knowledge of a given music will necessarily restrict the depth of this sort of discussion, just as it does with Western music, but consulting those who are more familiar with a given music is helpful. Goetze recommends that conductors “[h]onor the culture by deferring to the experts – native musicians from that culture.”³⁴ The aforementioned Swedish gospel choir, for example, works in close consultation with an American gospel choir in Chicago.³⁵

³⁴ Goetze, 25.

³⁵ Onovwerosuoke, 14–15.

Program notes provided for audiences or a lecture-concert with help from ethnomusicologists or musicians from the tradition being explored are also helpful ways of informing a Western audience of the background of a given ethnic work. Nick Page, giving a list of recommendations for the performance of multicultural music, advises:

Tell the stories. Every song has a thousand stories behind it. The story can simply be a translation of the text or a description of the hidden wonders within the text. The story can speak of how a song relates to its culture or historical period. It can describe how the culture behind the song makes music powerful in its own way.³⁶

Recreating the indigenous atmosphere of a given piece is not always practicable. Some types of music, such as Indian classical music, presuppose knowledge of the theory and practice behind the music which is usually beyond the level of an average Western audience.³⁷ Other types of music were never intended for a concert performance and so there is no indigenous concert atmosphere to evoke. Page notes, "Not all cultures have performance traditions with divisions between the audience and performer."³⁸ Sometimes the emulation of a traditional performance atmosphere is more offensive than it is loyal to an indigenous model. Page states, "If a chorus from outside the Gospel tradition performed rehearsed shouts of 'Amen! Preach it brother!' it might appear authentic, but . . . [it] would be an authenticity based on mimicry rather than an authenticity based on the honoring of a proud culture."³⁹

³⁶ Nick Page, "Choral Family Newsletter," <http://www.nickmusic.com/newslh.html>.

³⁷ Palmer, "World Musics," 34.

³⁸ Nick Page, "The Cultural Connection," *Choral Journal* 41 (March 2001): 30.

³⁹ "Choral Family Newsletter."

Audience participation, then, is very dependent on the culture whose music is being sung. Some cultures welcome or even expect an audience to react to performance in a certain way. Our own Western culture is perhaps the best example of this. Performance etiquette, such as the timing of applause, the expression of approval in the forms of traditional calls ('Bravo!' or a less dignified shout in the case of more informal popular music concerts), and the appropriateness of a standing ovation are all aspects of Western audience participation. As Westerners, audience members are expected to behave in certain ways, and deviation from the expected behaviour is often met with annoyance or even anger, no matter who the culprit may be – child or foreigner or, worst of all, an adult who should know better.

I recently had the experience of traveling in southern Africa and observing African audiences at many choral concerts. In an audience comprised of mostly black Africans, our Western tour group (mostly members of a Canadian youth choir) was conspicuous at first – applauding cautiously, glancing around in surprise at the sound of traditional sounds of audience appreciation (ululation from women or rhythmic shouts of 'tshu!' and 'drrrr!' from the men). Even though our group might be thoroughly enjoying our experience as an audience, our responses were initially limited to Western modes of expression – standing ovations, appreciative whistles or shouts during intervals of applause after a piece – but gradually, the younger members of our group began to experiment with more African modes of audience participation, to the great delight of African performers and audience alike. By the end of a four-week tour, many of us felt

perfectly comfortable with our new modes of applause. The women learned to approximate a ululating call (drawn from a traditional Zulu cry with which women encouraged men going into battle), the men learned how to reproduce the rhythmic calls, and all began to wave hands in the air as a form of silent applause. One particularly interesting audience response occurred in answer to a solo (whether instrumental or vocal) whereby one hand is raised and the index finger curls and straightens while the rest of the fingers are in a loose fist. We were informed that this gesture roughly translates as “Shine!” expressing both encouragement and appreciation to the soloist.

Though it seemed only proper and respectful for our group to assume these African responses while in Africa, the real test was our attempts to impart the experience to a largely Western audience in a concert of African choral music given months later in Canada. One choir member spoke to our Canadian audience, demonstrating the various modes of audience participation described above. Although not all of the audience reacted with equal eagerness, the African-like atmosphere generated by a few dozen enthusiastic participants had a remarkable effect on the atmosphere of the concert. Instead of maintaining the rather rigid Western division between audience and performers, there was suddenly a sense of interactivity which seemed to gradually relax even the most conservative of the audience members. A few South African audience members who were present for the concert afterwards expressed the feeling that this atmosphere had made them feel ‘at home’, and the performers – particularly those who had been among the

group in Africa – felt that the creation of an interactive atmosphere had made their performances much more authentic.

The essential difference between this experiment and the scenario of a non-African American choir emulating a gospel music atmosphere described by Page, is that the latter is predicated on the mimicry of beliefs that may not be held by the choir or audience, while the former provides the choir or audience an outlet for expression of their genuine responses to the music. This difference is vital in determining whether or not a given performance practice might be offensive to the culture whose music is being sung. Page’s dichotic division – mimicry, which is offensive, versus emulation, which is respectful⁴⁰ – is valuable for evaluating performance practices, particularly in regard to authentic ethnic music performance.

This is not to say that the division is always a clear one; only consultation with representatives of the source culture may be able to help discern one from the other. However, fear of giving offense is not a justifiable reason to avoid approaching true authenticity as closely as possible, if careful thought is given to the performance approach.

An example of a particularly sensitive issue is delineated by Page, in regard to the Jewish use of the Hebrew name of God. Speaking or singing the word ‘Adonai’ is proscribed in the Jewish faith, and Page suggests, “If you are doing a piece that uses this Holy word, be sensitive to its use. You can use the word ‘Adomai’ instead – with the letter ‘m’ replacing the letter ‘n’.”⁴¹

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

Another aspect of performance which merits consideration is the incorporation of movement that might traditionally accompany a piece. In the ethnomusicology text *Worlds of Music*, the subject is addressed. “A whole range of physical activity accompanies music. Playing a musical instrument, alone or in a group, not only creates sound but also literally moves people – that is, they sway, dance, walk, work in response.”⁴² Movement can be highly ritualized and controlled, such as in Western ballet or Indian classical dance, or it can be spontaneous and unstructured, such as in rock music. Western choral tradition minimizes movement of choristers and many singers are extremely uncomfortable with the notion of moving or dancing while singing. However, Goetze points out, “Western musicians consider music to be only sound and thus downplay the visual aspects of a performance even though, in many cultures, dance, dress, and even context and community are inseparable from the sound.”⁴³ Returning to the example of African choral music, Onovwerosuoke advises: “Choreograph interpretive gesturing and dance steps. This is where many directors tend to draw the line. The point to remember is that simple dance steps and gesturing can bring your song alive, and captivate your audience[.]”⁴⁴ More to the point, perhaps, is the fact that many African choral songs integrate certain movements as part of their structure. Gideon Sijuba, a young Namibian composer and choral conductor, has transcribed a song which is traditional among his people, the Caprivi. *Mulumele Shangwe* (see Example 1) is a welcoming song which is traditionally

⁴² Jeff Todd Titon and Mark Slobin, “The Music-Culture as a World of Music,” in *Worlds of Music*, ed. Jeff Todd Titon, 4th ed., (Stamford: Schirmer, 2002), 28.

⁴³ Goetze, 26.

⁴⁴ Onovwerosuoke, 17.

sung by the Caprivi as a means of greeting visitors to a village. The singers bow in welcome as they sing, then lift the hands and separate them as they are lowered in an expansive but simple gesture of generosity and hospitality.

(CAPRIVI TRAD)

MULU ME LE SHANGWE MULU ME LE SHANGWE MULU ME LE SHANGWE LWA

MULU ME LE SHANGWE MULU ME LE SHANGWE MULU ME LE SHANGWE LWA

MI BO NA LWA LWA BILE KWA KU MI BO NA

Example 1: *Mulumele Shangwe* (Caprivi Traditional, Transcribed by Gideon Sijuba)⁴⁵

In a lighter vein, the traditional Nama piece *Sida Ge !Gaisa !Gaisa*, which is about drinking the African liqueur amarula, is traditionally accompanied by exaggerated motions of tossing back the drink, and singers pretend to become more and more intoxicated as the song proceeds. To omit the traditional gestures in either *Sida Ge !Gaisa !Gaisa* or *Mulumele Shangwe* would strip each piece of meaning and impact.

⁴⁵ Gideon Sijuba, transcr., *Mulumele Shangwe*, unpublished score, 2004.

Western reliance on the printed page points to one final aspect of performance practice concerning memorization. Once again, this is a consideration which is mostly applicable to the performance of authentic ethnic music rather than ethnic-influenced music, but it need not be restricted to the former. Part of the ethnic flavour of a given performance is linked to the visual impact of the performers in front of the audience. A choir holding black choral folders and reading Latin American rhythms from a score is less likely to embrace the feeling of the music than a choir which has committed the time and effort to memorizing the same music. Onovwersuoke writes, “This not only facilitates the performance, but also frees up singers, mentally, to incorporate other meaningful performance practices.”⁴⁶

Goetze recommends taking the memorization process a step farther, and suggests abandoning print music altogether for the learning and performing of ethnic music. Though the process may seem daunting, especially to skilled sight-readers, she states that “[f]or trained musicians, looking at a score first often limits perception; that is, they hear only what they see on the printed page.”⁴⁷ This is a skill that is naturally honed in Western musicians since the Western system of music notation is designed to describe the sound of the music as accurately as possible in writing. However, due to differences between Western tonal systems of theory and other musical systems, as discussed earlier, the Western method of notation is not always adequate to transmit the intricacies and details of other musics, particularly those which involve pitch inflections that may encompass

⁴⁶ Onovwersuoke, 17.

⁴⁷ Goetze, 25.

quarter tones and rhythmic feels which do not necessarily equate with common metric patterns, though they may fit into Western metric notation on the printed page. Even if a score is available, usually in the case of ethnic-influenced music, Goetze advocates an aural approach to learning. “[The ensemble] will listen more intensely, knowing that they will be reproducing what they hear In addition to improving their aural acuity, the process contributes to memory, rhythm, and pitch perception.”⁴⁸

If this process is awkward at first, consider the reverse situation of the singer raised in a culture where music is aurally transmitted, suddenly finding him- or herself in a choir where everything is read off the page. Even familiarity with the Western system of notation does not necessarily alter the cultural desire to learn aurally. I was privileged to witness a young South African singer on exchange with the Kokopelli youth choir in Edmonton in the spring of 2005. Even though the young man was fluent in Western notation, his method of learning the bass line in a given piece was to literally rest his chin on the shoulder of a fellow bass, leaning in close to read the words and notation on the page and listen to his colleague simultaneously. Though this practice was perhaps a little disconcerting for the Western singer involved, the young South African demonstrated his culture’s reliance on aural transmission to confirm what the eye reads.

One major obstacle to this aural process can be learning text, however. After all, it is unlikely that many choristers (if any) will be familiar with the language being sung, particularly for more exotic ethnic music. Learning the text correctly

⁴⁸ *Ibid*, 26.

might require the use of the printed word. Onovwersuoke suggests, “whenever in doubt, consult a native speaker[.]”⁴⁹

Mary Goetze’s solution to the problem of accessing a native speaker is presented in her project, *Global Voices in Song*. This project exists “to facilitate the oral transmission of choral music from a variety of world cultures.”⁵⁰ With Goetze’s own International Vocal Ensemble⁵¹ as a testing ground for the initiative, the project has produced a CD-ROM intended for classroom use in the teaching and performance of ethnic music. Goetze aims to gather music from all around the world, but thus far, South Africa and Hungary have been the focus.⁵² Future releases include music from Japan and New Zealand, as well as more South African songs. As the project’s website explains, “Each song is presented with video instructions for learning the dance, actions or game, and a slide show introduces students to the culture from which the songs come.”⁵³ Goetze’s success with her university-based International Vocal Ensemble is testament to the potential usefulness of this approach.

Programming Ethnic Music

For many decades, it has been considered normal practice for choral conductors to end a program with one or more pieces from an ethnic tradition other than the Western classical tradition. Very often these pieces are from the

⁴⁹ Onovwersuoke, 17.

⁵⁰ Gratto, 23.

⁵¹ Indiana University School of Music, “International Vocal Ensemble,” <http://www.indiana.edu/~ive/>.

⁵² Mj and Associates, “Global Voices in Song,” <http://www.globalvoicesinsong.com/upcoming.html>.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, <http://www.globalvoicesinsong.com/index.html>.

spiritual or gospel tradition and they carry great audience appeal. Sometimes they can be real showpieces for a choir's range of dynamics, such as Moses Hogan's powerhouse arrangement of *The Battle of Jericho*; other times, these pieces are simple, accessible and often require less rehearsal time. While this is probably a good approach from the perspective of programming – sending the audience out smiling, toes tapping – from an ethnomusicological perspective, this practice could be viewed as degrading to the music performed, or even offensive to the culture whose music is being performed. When music from one culture is isolated and assigned a purpose of entertaining and lightening a program filled with Western art music, the implied message is that the ethnic music is somehow less important or less valuable than the Western music which makes up the bulk of the program.

Suzanne Tiemstra states: “Whenever possible, integrate different kinds of music into every program, rather than performing concerts with only one kind of music. In this way, we can avoid ‘ghetto-izing’ any music by isolating it.”⁵⁴ While the first part of her assertion seems like a good solution for the problem posed above, the second part of Tiemstra’s advice does not necessarily hold up as well. Instead of placing two token multicultural pieces at the end of the program, the integration of multicultural music into a concert program is an effective way to affirm the value and validity of any given piece of ethnic music. However, Tiemstra’s suggestion, that isolating a music ‘ghetto-izes’ it, is difficult to comprehend. The Oxford English Dictionary defines the word *ghetto*:

⁵⁴ Suzanne Tiemstra, “Far and Beyond: Resources for Unusual Multicultural Music,” *Choral Journal* 41 (March 2001): 59.

A quarter in a city, esp. a thickly populated slum area, inhabited by a minority group or groups, usu. as a result of economic or social pressures; an area, etc., occupied by an isolated group; an isolated or segregated group, community, or area.⁵⁵

In reference to programming ethnic music, the term ‘ghetto-ize’ can therefore be extrapolated to mean an isolated group of pieces considered to be of lower value in the midst of a Western program which is ‘wealthier’ in musical worth. In other words, the accepted practice of grouping a set of ethnic pieces at the end of a program and assigning them a less significant place in the program aptly describes the ‘ghetto-ization’ of ethnic music.

But what of an entire program comprised only of ethnic music, which is what Tiemstra derides? No one would accuse a conductor of ‘ghetto-izing’ Viennese music if a program consisted only of the music of Mozart and Beethoven. If one is to apply the same respect and appreciation to ethnic music which is applied to Western classical music, it does not seem possible that performing a full program of Latin American music, for example, could be considered any more demeaning than an all-Viennese program. As Tiemstra says herself, “Programming multicultural music is a matter involving purpose and philosophy.”⁵⁶ Respecting and honouring ethnic music means treating it as equal in value to Western art music.

Trends in Multicultural Choral Music – Authentic Ethnic Music

The bi-annual conference of the International Society for Music Education was held in Pretoria, South Africa in 1998, igniting a wave of enthusiasm for the

⁵⁵ *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed., 1989.

⁵⁶ Tiemstra, 59.

choral music of South Africa. This is not the first time that South African choral music has come into the Western spotlight. Paul Simon's *Graceland* album, released in 1986, sparked the initial wave of interest. On the album, Simon collaborates with Joseph Shabalala of the *a cappella* vocal group Ladysmith Black Mambazo. Shabalala was not the founder of the *a cappella* African style for which his ensemble is rightly famous, however. John Schaefer explains: "The course of South African music was altered and shaped by a male soprano, Solomon Linda. In 1939, Linda wrote 'Mbube' ('The Lion'), which not only shattered sales records but came to define a whole style of music."⁵⁷ The 'mbube' style, made famous in the West by the Tokens' version of the song ('The Lion Sleeps Tonight'), is still a vital force in southern African music and characterizes the choral style of many traditional songs. Onovwerosuoke writes:

'Euro-African music' . . . represents the most visible of colonial influences on African music, and [these songs] have found appreciative audiences all over Europe and the Americas . . . [T]heir wide acceptance is . . . due to their unique and exotic treatment of common European harmonies.⁵⁸

Because of the traditional element of movement, this type of African choral music is also popular in school music. For the same reason, the music has yet to become a standard part of choral repertoire for adult and university choirs. However, it is a rich area for any conductor who is willing to experiment with aspects of movement in music. Choral music in South Africa is vibrant and strong, and with the help of technology, it is easier than ever to access recordings of African choral music. Even with the growing movement away from printed

⁵⁷ John Schaefer, "'Songlines': Vocal Traditions in World Music," in *The Cambridge Companion to Singing*, ed. John Potter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 19.

⁵⁸ Onovwerosuoke, 10–11.

music in regard to ethnic music, many young African musicians are attempting to transcribe and preserve the music of their culture, so more and more music is becoming available in printed form. Because, unlike many kinds of ethnic vocal music, this music is sung in mixed harmony like Western choral music, South African *mbube* music is also one of the best ways a Western choir can both enjoy singing multicultural music and maintain a high degree of authenticity.

South Africa is a particularly fascinating case in point, as the dissolution of Apartheid has left a land that is still deeply divided. There are many choirs, both white and black, who sing both traditional African music and European-derived Afrikaans music, but there are as yet very few choirs with both white and black members who sing both kinds of music. Many white choirs sing the black traditional songs much in the same way we as North Americans often sing black spirituals – as show-stoppers at the end of a program, often not deigning to adopt a true African vocal timbre. I spoke with a white choral conductor who was concerned about the other side of the equation; she has observed a shift in black choral tone over the past decade, moving away from the traditional bright and weighty vocal timbre towards a rounder operatic Western timbre. According to this conductor, Marijke Roos, the black people of South Africa are reacting to the unfortunate misconception many white Africans hold, that black music is insubstantial. The shift towards a more European tone quality is an obvious effort to make black African music sound more like the ‘legitimate’ European styles. More research is needed to substantiate this observation. As racial tensions slowly dissolve in this troubled country, it is still difficult to discern truth from myth.

Trends in Multicultural Choral Music – Ethnic-Influenced Music

Thanks to the growing interest in multicultural content in school music education, the world of ethnic-influenced choral music has expanded greatly in recent years. Though universities and community choirs have perhaps been the last to join in the move towards multicultural programming, many leading professional ensembles have begun to embrace multicultural influences in the repertoire as well as school music programs. A brief survey can only scratch the surface of this vast and expanding movement, but a few bright examples will help to illuminate some of the current trends in music education and in choral music at large.

Stephen Hatfield's choral arrangements and compositions span the globe in their ethnic influences and are one of Canada's greatest resources for multicultural choral music. Hatfield states: "I am most known for the multicultural elements in my music, and certainly the majority of my published pieces are influenced, directly or indirectly, by musical cultures from around the world."⁵⁹ Hatfield is particularly skillful in translating perceived incompatible world musics into forms that are more easily performed by the Western choir. His extensively researched program notes also provide helpful background information for both conductor and choir. One of his works for treble choir, *Ödi Ödi*, is an arrangement of a Tamil piece. Hatfield first identifies the origins and current distribution of the Tamil people, then explains the music theory on which the piece is based: "Like many other musical traditions in southern Asia, the emphasis is placed on rhythmic subtlety, and on making the appropriate choice

⁵⁹ Stephen Hatfield, "Thoughts," <http://www.stephenhatfield.com>.

from an enormous variety of possible scale patterns.”⁶⁰ Hatfield also makes suggestions for auxiliary instruments and vocal timbre. The piece itself incorporates a Tamil song and text, supported by a three-part drone in 7/8 time (see Example 2).

Treble I
upper notes 2nd time only - keep lower notes light

Vä - di vä - di vä - di vä - di măn - dru pō na măn - dhu - rul

Vä - di vä - di vä - di vä - di măn - dru pō na măn - dhu - rul

Treble II

Vä - di vä - di vä - di vä - di măn - dru pō na măn - dhu - rul

Kö - di kö - di kö - di kö - di yen - ni - ran - dha kö - di - yay

Kö - di kö - di kö - di kö - di yen - ni - ran - dha kö - di - yay

Kö - di kö - di kö - di kö - di yen - ni - ran - dha kö - di - yay

Example 2: *Ödi Ödi*, mm. 22–29.

A more adventurous side of Hatfield is seen in his work *Tjak!* Not written for any particular voicing, *Tjak!* is adaptable to any kind of four-part chorus, and is based on a Balinese ritual called *Ketjak*. Hatfield asks that the chorus sit in a circular position on the stage, with each ‘section’ (here simply called ‘groups’) forming part of concentric circles, as would be traditional for indigenous performances (see Figure 3).

⁶⁰ Stephen Hatfield., Doreen Rao’s Building Bridges Series, OCTB6850 ([USA]: Boosey & Hawkes, 1996): 2.

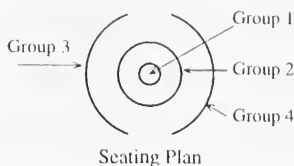


Figure 3: Seating Plan for *Tjak!*

Hatfield introduces an aleatoric or improvisatory element to the music as well, as the piece is to be led by a singer within the group using pre-planned calls and shouts. Because the piece consists of short interlocking rhythmic units in four-part counterpoint, a second aleatoric element exists in the possibility that the leader might call for a change of sections at a point other than at the end of a unit. Hatfield advises, “Should a group discover that after the ‘call to move’ has been given, they find that their particular ostinato has synced up with the rest of the choir in a different way than expected, the best thing to do is to just keep going.”⁶¹ Though the use of a ritual is perhaps somewhat questionable in terms of respectful authenticity, *Tjak!* taps into an area of ethnic music that is rarely accessed by choirs. Hatfield writes: “[*Tjak!*] is not a transcription or a recreation of [the Balinese] ritual, but it has adopted many aspects of the Balinese music[.]”⁶² Hatfield’s pieces are explicitly meant to educate singers and audiences about different kinds of ethnic music. However, not all composers and arrangers use such ethnic influences for an educational purpose. Many pieces with strong ethnic influences instead rely on the ethnic elements as extended compositional elements, much like those used in many twentieth century vocal works. In fact,

⁶¹ Stephen Hatfield, Doreen Rao’s Building Bridges Series, OCTB6905 ([USA]: Boosey & Hawkes, 1997): 3.

⁶² *Ibid.*

many of the extended vocal techniques described as revolutionary or unprecedented in vocal music of the mid-twentieth century are in fact found in many other ethnic musics. Aside from shifts away from a traditional *bel canto* timbre, twentieth century composers use vocal clicks⁶³, such as those found in many African languages. Quarter-tones and microtones, used in many Asian and Eastern European musics, are also employed in contemporary vocal music.⁶⁴ Overtone singing, like that employed by some Tibetan monks⁶⁵ and Tuvan throat singers⁶⁶, is another example. In this technique, a fundamental frequency (produced by various means – either using the supraglottic folds, vocal fry using the vocal folds, or simply a low pitch using normal phonation) is held and the vocal tract is manipulated using the tongue and soft palate to exaggerate certain overtones.

Australian composer Sarah Hopkins uses this vocal technique in her composition, *Past Life Melodies*. Like Hatfield, Hopkins suggests a standing formation other than a traditional choral placement, layering the parts in concentric semi-circles with more important melodic parts in the center of the formation. The piece is divided into three distinct sections, each section coloured with non-Western sounds. The first section consists of a wordless melody beginning with a descending semitone, apparently drawn from a non-diatonic scale (see Example 3).

⁶³ Mabry, *Exploring Twentieth-Century Vocal Music*, 136.

⁶⁴ Sharon Mabry, "Extreme Choices," *Journal of Singing* 54 (March/April 1998): 49.

⁶⁵ Huston Smith, Kenneth N. Stevens, and Raymond S. Tomlinson, "On an Unusual Mode of Chanting by Certain Tibetan Lamas," *Journal of the Acoustical Society of America* 41 (1967): 1262.

⁶⁶ George Musser, "Forming Formants," *Scientific American* 281 (September 1999): [np].

Parts 1-7
Sopranos
Altos
Tenors
mf mm (resonant humming) mm mm mm

Parts 8-11
Basses
mf mm (resonant humming) mm mm mm

1-7
(mm) mm mm mm Divide as indicated

8-11
(mm) mm mm mm Divide as indicated

Example 3: *Past Life Melodies* mm. 1-8

The second section is based on the sound of Australian aboriginal music, with a didgeridoo-like chord cluster held by one part of the choir while the other part of the choir sings a chant-like melody which gradually dominates the texture. The third section uses overtone singing described above, with little notated in the score other than the duration of each phrase. The overtone singers⁶⁷ are meant to improvise freely, playing with their overtone melodies “like gold and silver threads”⁶⁸. Clearly, Hopkins is not trying to evoke a single culture or tradition in this work, but instead drawing on non-Western musical influences to generate “holistic music, music which engages and celebrates the totality of our being.”⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Hopkins indicates six overtone singers, but this is more likely to be determined by the number of singers in a given ensemble who are able to produce strong, audible overtone singing.

⁶⁸ Sarah Hopkins, *Past Life Melodies*, MM2001 (Toowong Australia: Morton Music, 1992): 7.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, iii.

In sharp contrast to Hopkins' lofty humanistic goals, Finnish composer Jaakko Mäntyjärvi draws on folk sounds and forms in a purely parodical manner. His choral work, *El Hambo*, is prefaced with the following disclaimer:

To the best of my knowledge, the text of *El Hambo* does not and is not intended to mean anything, with the sole exception of the single word *hambo*, which is a Swedish folk dance ... in 3/4 time. This augmented hambo in 5/4 time is something of a tribute to those folk musicians whose enthusiasm much exceeds their sense of rhythm ... Sources of inspiration for this piece include, surprisingly, genuine Norwegian choral folk song arrangements and of course the Swedish Chef in *The Muppet Show*.⁷⁰

All levity aside, Mäntyjärvi truly does draw on folk influences – both real and popular misconceptions thereof – to evoke a parody of a Swedish sound, which is principally recognizable for its Scandinavian vowel shapes. Scandinavian folk singing also uses a more nasal vocal timbre than mainstream European art music, and these sounds are often enthusiastically applied by choirs performing this piece, or its “embarrassingly similar”⁷¹ companion, *Pseudo-Yoik*.

Rajaton, a vocal ensemble which also hails from Finland, similarly employs brighter, less conventional vocal timbres in its music. Part of the six-voice *cappella* ensemble's mandate is to create a unique sound for each piece performed, ranging from arrangements of Beatles tunes to Finnish folk melodies to newly-composed music written by or for the ensemble.⁷² *We Walk in a Fog*, composed by Rajaton bass Jussi Chydenius, appears to be a relatively simple vocal arrangement upon first glance. There are no syllables or even dynamic markings – the only text is the words in the bass line (incidentally, translated into

⁷⁰ Jaakko Mäntyjärvi, *El Hambo*, WW1264 (Helsinki: Sulasol, 1997), 1.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² Rajaton Vocal Ensemble, “Rajaton Vocal Ensemble”, http://www.rajaton.org/main.site?set_language=eng.

English by Mäntyjärvi). But a recording of the piece⁷³ reveals a totally different timbral world than is evident from the printed manuscript. A simple two-measure ostinato in the alto (see Example 4) is given the sound of a muted horn, and the bass line imitates an acoustic string bass.



Example 4: *We Walk in a Fog*, mm. 5–6, alto line.

These timbres are more vocal jazz-influenced than ethnically-derived, but Rajaton's unique sound spans into the ethnic realm as well. *Dobbin's Flowery Vale* is an arrangement of an Irish folk tune by Matti Kallio. Again, on the page this score appears fairly unremarkable, void of dynamics and having only the most basic of syllables or vowels for each line. In the recording⁷⁴ however, the first soprano (Essi Wuorela) employs an almost abrasively bright tone, drawing on her professional background as a pop and jazz singer to bring the folk melody into sharp contrast with the darker, fuller sounds of the accompaniment. Several of the Rajaton members have studied Finnish folk music, and this is evident in some of the extreme vocal timbres they use.

Sid Robinovich, a Canadian composer, also draws on his Jewish vocal heritage in some of his works. Ian Loeppky describes elements of folk influences in Robinovich's *Talmud Suite*, which sets texts from the Jewish Talmud.⁷⁵ Loeppky concludes, "Robinovich makes no use of explicit references to ancient Jewish music ... Yet a case can be made for the influence of several pre-existing

⁷³ Rajaton, *Boundless*, PLACD004 ([Finland]: Musicmakers, 2001), compact disc.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ Ian Loeppky, "Folk, Traditional, and Non-Western Influences in the Choral Works of Sid Robinovich: An Examination of Two Choral Suites," *Choral Journal* 45 (December 2004): 10–21.

forms of traditional Jewish music ... [including] the evocation of so-called ‘cantorial’ singing, the incorporation of Jewish heterophony or ‘organum’, and the use of a folk-dance style.”⁷⁶ The final movement of the suite, *Prayer Before Sleep*, is perhaps the least strongly influenced of the pieces, but nonetheless, the cantorial singing Loeppky mentions is evident even in the opening lines (see Example 5). The low voice, heard in monophony with a legato line and simple melodic contour are all characteristic of the Jewish cantorial style.



Example 5: *Prayer Before Sleep*, mm. 1–4.

These examples of ethnic-influenced choral music are a tiny representation of a great body of repertoire that keeps growing. Although the issues of authenticity defined in this paper are not always equally important or applicable, all these works contain elements of ethnic music which can be drawn upon in authentic ways to enhance their importance.

Benefits of World Music in the Choral Realm

By examining the music of other cultures, students receive refreshing and diverse perspectives on what it means to be human. They see, for example, that in most cultures there is no separation between music, dance, art, and ritual or that in these cultures music is an essential part of daily life ... Seeing how other cultures define the human experience helps us to define our own lives.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁷⁷ Nick Page, *Sing and Shine On: The Teacher's Guide to Multicultural Song Leading* (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1995), 143.

What Nick Page here applies to music students is just as applicable to performers of choral music and their audiences. Canada is a mosaic made up of many different cultures, and performing and honouring the music of those cultures can help to increase understanding between people with different ethnic backgrounds.

Multicultural music can also broaden a choir's repertoire. Many choirs sing motets, but how many sing Balinese ritual music? By broadening the definition of choral repertoire to include multicultural pieces, both authentic and ethnic-influenced, choral conductors are open to a wealth of untapped choral music. There is great art in the music of other cultures and great poetry exists in non-Western forms. Exposure to different art forms can only enrich our understanding of the Western traditions which are more familiar.

In more pragmatic terms, incorporating ethnic music into a choir's repertoire can also draw entirely different audiences. The aficionado of Zimbabwean song and dance may not be a lover of Bach's music. Creating connections between different communities of audiences is possible with integrated programming. World music can also link artists within a community. Tiemstra points out that "[m]ulticultural music lends itself to collaboration with dancers, visual artists, culinary artists, historians, costumers, and people in the social sciences."⁷⁸ Performing ethnic works gives choirs a chance to work with instrumentalists who have studied instruments in a culture, as well. And on a larger scale, studying the music of one culture provides an impetus to make international connections with ethnic choirs around the world.

⁷⁸ Tiemstra, 59.

Palmer writes:

The multifaceted experience of humankind lies in the arts of a people, and music is one of the most delightful means of achieving a deeper understanding of that humanity. Music reflects holistically the woof and warp of a culture, its past, present, and future yearning, its glory and its despair, its delight and its grief. What better reason for investing one's time and efforts than to plumb the depths of our own and others' humanity through music?⁷⁹

If multicultural music can offer so much to the choral community, then it seems only natural to reciprocate by according this music the respect it deserves. Study of and immersion in the music of a non-Western culture will help ensure that performances are as authentic as possible, and that authenticity will in itself enrich the musical lives of performers and audiences alike.

⁷⁹ Palmer, "Ethnic Musics," 14.

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